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Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator) *for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*

The *Interim Atlas* - at last

After promises in the last two issue of *Phoenix* I am very please to be able to report at last that *An Interim Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* appeared in October this year. The date of the manuscript is March 1995 although a very few later records are included. It has been published by the NCWCD and was printed in Riyadh. It is in A4 report format with a soft cover. In its 134 pages there are details of the breeding in Arabia of 245 species; for each brief information is given of range, occurrence, habitat and breeding biology. Distribution maps are included for 198 species. Species not mapped are generally those with only a very few breeding records.

The main objective of the *Interim Atlas* is to stimulate further research into the breeding range and biology of birds in Arabia and especially to collect information where there appear to be gaps in knowledge at present. It is important to recognise that the *Interim Atlas* is only a stepping stone on the way to the final atlas. Everyone who has records of Arabian birds or who is currently active in Arabia is urged to closely examine the *Interim Atlas* with a view to adding to the species distribution database, provide further information on breeding biology or offer suggestions for improvement. It will be apparent from the narratives in the *Interim Atlas* that for many species there is still very scanty information available from Arabia on the breeding season and basic biology. This is one important area where everyone can contribute. Detailed observations at nests are very important, even for common species. Also there are still many squares for which there are no records on the database. The biggest gap is of course much of the Empty Quarter but one should not assume that it is only remote areas where there are no records, some unreported squares appear to be on a main highway.

The *Interim Atlas* is the achievement of a great many people and I would like to record my heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed records, information, suggestions, cash and in-kind support to the project over the last ten years. The records of over 200 observers have been used in the *Interim Atlas* and additional observers make contact almost every week, including some who were last in Arabia a decade or more ago and have only just heard of the project! The *Interim Atlas* is almost completely comprised of observers reports, only a very little

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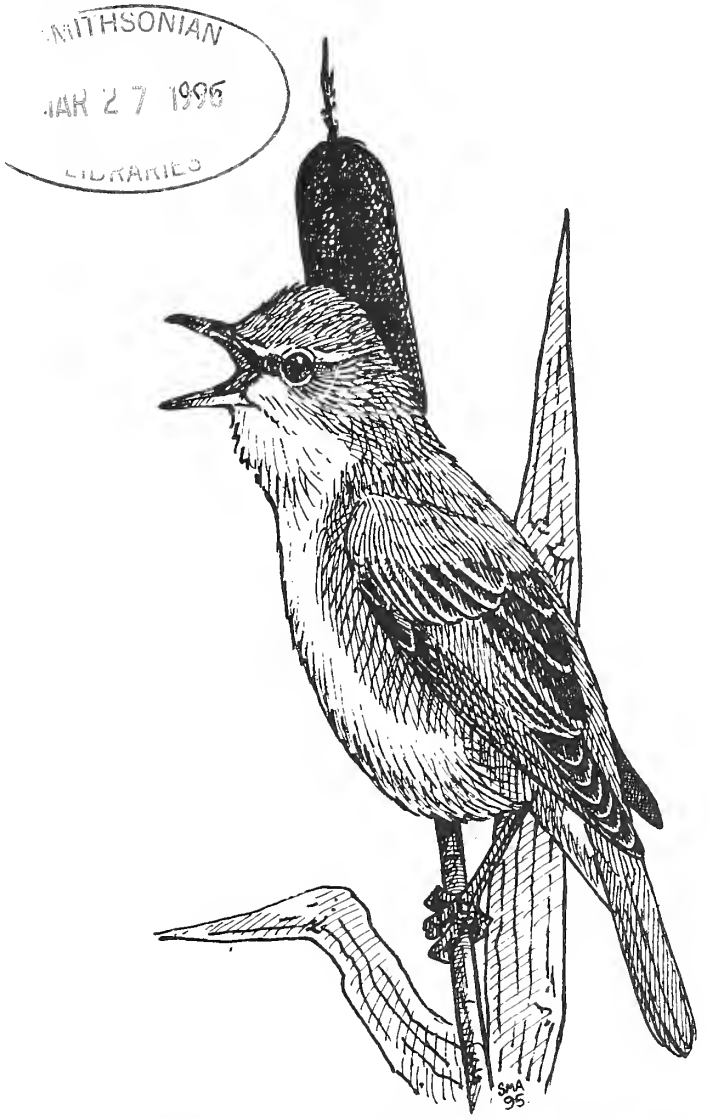

Fig 1 The great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* was proved to have bred in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1995. The first Arabian breeding record. See Page 2.

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وإنمائها،
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض،
المملكة العربية السعودية

published material was included and that was only because of the delay in production. The final atlas will seek to include all recently published material as well as much old and unpublished data that can be traced. One problem of the almost exclusive use of observers records in preparing the *Interim Atlas* is that some important records in recent publications, which have not been reported directly to the ABBA project, will not appear on the maps. This is an anomaly that readers should bear in mind. The ABBA library has an almost complete collection of published material and it will all appear in the final atlas. Please be patient.

I have distributed free copies to many of the observers and the NCWCD has sent many others out to those who have given much assistance to the project since 1984. Readers who would like to obtain a copy may write to the NCWCD, P O Box 61681, Riyadh 11575, Saudi Arabia. The cost is £8 which includes postage and packing. This represents extremely good value but I am a little biased. Please note that those who have contributed records to the project, but have not already received a free copy, qualify for discount price of £5, post free.

Michael Jennings

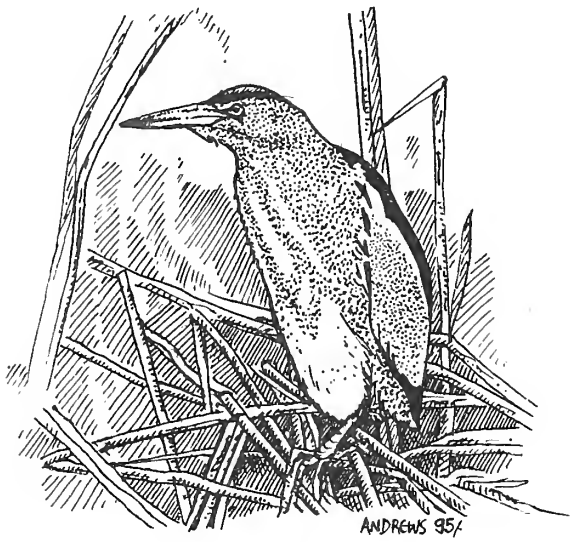

Fig 2. A minimum of three pairs of little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* bred at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), Eastern Province Saudi Arabia, May 1995 (P Symens).

Recent Reports:

The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months; some relate to earlier years. Some of these records may not have been accepted yet by local recorders.

Brown booby *Sula leucogaster*
1200 on cliffs of Kutman island (IA08) Yemen Red Sea, apparently about to nest, March 1995 (R F Porter).

Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*
Three hundred and fifty nest scrapes, about one third contained eggs, on the Qatari island of al Aliyah (RB27) in January 1994 (R & H Nation). The same island was not used for nesting 1992, 1993, or 1995.

Reef heron *Egretta gularis*
On al Aliyah island (RB27) Qatar there were 17 pairs with nests, which contained eggs and young, on top of *Arthrocnemum* bushes, in May 1995 (R & H Nation).

Purple heron *Ardea purpurea*
Adult seen visiting the same site in mangroves six times over two days, near Luhayyah (IB08), Yemen - undoubtedly nesting (R F Porter).

Lesser flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*
There appears to have been an unusually large eruption into southwest Arabia from Africa during 1995. There were 1250 at Hodeidah lagoons (IB06), Yemen, in March 1995 (R F Porter). There were also 300 or so scattered along the khors of Dhofar Province, Oman during November 1995 (MCJ). Perhaps the most curious record was one dead on the road near Ghaba (XA19), central Oman in the same month (MCJ).

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*
One Jebel Shada (HA16), Hejaz, Saudi Arabia, February 1995 (G R Lobley), possibly the northernmost record.

Purple gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Still several at the Jahra pools site (NB35), Kuwait 1995 but no proof of breeding (C Pilcher). One was also present at Ruwais, UAE in September 1995 (*Gazelle* Vol 10 No 10).

Yellow-legged gull
Two pairs of herring/lesser black-backed gull of *cachinnans* type displaying Kutman island (IA08) Yemen (R F Porter).

Barn owl *Tyto alba*
A nest with 10 eggs, October 1995 in a well at the Sun Farms, Salalah (UA11), Oman (I J A Brown).

Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*
One calling in the hills west of Mughsail (TB10) Dhofar, Oman, November 1995 (MCJ). This was in a new square and was also apparently the first record from a cliff adjacent to the sea, anywhere in its range.

Alexandrine parrakeet *Psittacula eupatria*
Nests with young Abu Dhabi 1993 and Dubai June 1995, also observed Ras al Khaimah April 1995 (S Aspinall).

Singing bush lark *Mirafra cantillans*
Three southwest Saudi Arabia (IB11) September 1995 (G R Lobley).

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Display flight with at least two males singing, Qatar (RA27). February 1995 (R&H Nation).

White wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Pair copulating Qatar (RA27), February 1995 (R&H Nation).

Clamorous warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*
An adult feeding recently fledged young at ath Thamad (FA28), western Saudi Arabia, July 1994 (J-O Hedin). An inland breeding record in a new area. Also the first record of singing from Qatar (RB26), March 1995 (R&H Nation).

House crow *Corvus splendens*
Has been reported as a pest in the Ras Tanura region of the Eastern Province (QA30) and apparently control measures have been instigated to keep numbers down (R Wellington).

Common mynah *Acridotheres tristis*
Group of five Arzaneh island (SB26) western UAE, January 1995 (S Aspinall).

Golden-winged grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*
Feeding on juniper berries (HA18) western Saudi Arabia March 1995 (G R Lobley). Northernmost record.

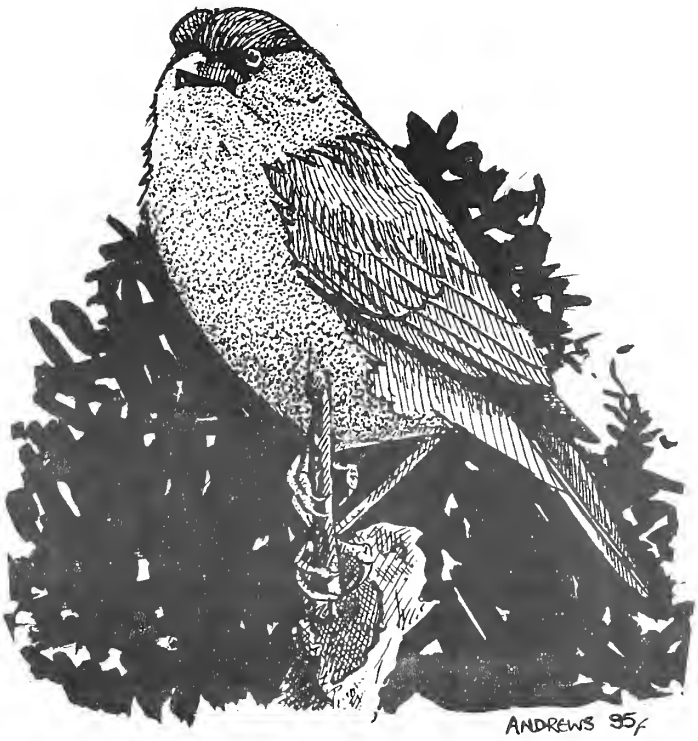

Fig 3. The brahminy mynah *Sturnus pagodarum* is one of 15 exotic species that have been added to the list of Arabian breeding birds since the start of the ABBA project in 1984. A further 25 species have naturally extended their range into Arabia or been found breeding for the first time during the same period. A full listing of the 40 new Arabian breeding birds found over the ABBA period is at Page 20.

Sites of Interest:

This column aims to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. The series of site reports appearing in the issues of *Phoenix* are not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a number of them are exceptionally good bird areas.

Observers are asked to submit details of other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or a whole mountain range.

Sir Bani Yas Island

Sir Bani Yas (SB25) is a pear shaped island approximately 12 km by 15 km, lying some 3 km off the UAE coast near Jebel Dhanna. Originally it was a barren somewhat rocky island with low central hills surrounded by flat gravel plains and small sandy beaches. However the island has been subject to extensive dredging and landscaping in recent years. Work done includes construction of three ornamental lakes, the planting of mudflats with mangroves and the sandy plains with native trees, especially ghaf and acacia but also exotics such as mesquite and fruit trees, including date palm, oranges, limes, lemon, olive, pomegranate and banana. There are also vineyards, fodder fields, flower gardens and bougainvillaea lined boulevards. Without a drop of natural water except the occasional rare rainstorm all this vegetation has to be supported by artificial watering, piped from a desalination plant at Jebel Dhanna on the mainland. The island infrastructure includes a power plant, jetties, runway for aircraft, housing for workers, metalled roads as well as numerous tracks that criss-cross the island.

The reason for all this activity is that the island is now the private zoo and resort of Sheikh Zayed UAE President and ruler of Abu Dhabi. Massive fenced enclosures have been constructed for the mammals, including species that formerly inhabited the UAE such as oryx and gazelle and exotics like deer, llama, eland, giraffe, Barbary sheep and mountain goat. Most are breeding successfully. There is a 3 km by 1 km houbara *Chlamydotis undulata* enclosure, which also houses white-bellied *Eupodotis senegalensis*, Nubian *Neotis nuba*, Heughlin's *N. heuglinii* and five free flying kori bustards *Ardeotis kori*. Other cages hold raptors, most, it is said, have been captured on the island and include a dark chanting goshawk *Melierax metabates* which is reported to have been caught on Dalma island (SA26) about 1989.

Access to the island is by boat only and is restricted to those having business there. Adrian Chapman and Dave Robinson have been fortunate to have been able to visit the island several times in recent years and have recorded the progress of the various introduced mammals and birds and their establishment from semi wild, feral to fully naturalised status in some cases. Enormous logistical effort is needed to provide food for the huge menagerie of mammals and birds both caged and feral. Apparently tons of grain are put down each day for the animals and birds and numerous drinking troughs are kept full of water. In this environment some unusually large populations of introduced birds and mammals have built up but you would need to look hard to find any indigenous breeding birds. The islands remains a superb spot to observe bird migration.

Outside the main enclosures a reputed population of 10,000 gazelle roam free and not a leaf of unprotected vegetation is left. The bird fauna is remarkable for its exotics. It includes

see-see partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis* (probably brought from Iran), which is very numerous and breeding ferally, also chukar partridge *Alectoris chukar* which are just as successful. In lesser numbers are grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* and a few black francolin *F. francolinus*, common peafowl *Pavo cristatus* and yellow-necked francolin (spurfowl) *F. leucoscepus*, all breeding ferally. One of the more unexpected birds to breed ferally is the grey crowned crane *Balearica regulorum*, which now fends for itself. This bird only bred successfully after being released from captivity. There have been escapes from the quail *Coturnix coturnix* farm but the species also occurs naturally and may even breed in the fodder fields as it does elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf. Flying around the cages and enclosures are white-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*, collared doves *Streptopelia decaocto* (both likely introductions from elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf) and Barbary dove *S. roseogrisea (risoria)*, the domesticated form of the African collared dove *S. roseogrisea*. Rock doves *Columba livia* visit in large numbers from nearby islands where they breed. The free roaming cassowarys *Casuarius* sp are not breeding - one of the island's few failures!

What does the situation on Sir Bani Yas mean for Arabia? The alteration of the island has lost a small part of the original Arabian Gulf habitat and along with it the indigenous avifauna that was once present. Unfortunately there is very little published on the former wildlife of the island so we will perhaps never know what has been lost. But we have certainly gained some liabilities. One could argue that if you are going to have free roaming animals then the best place to keep them is on an island. But birds are very mobile so what is going to happen when those on Sir Bani Yas get to the mainland. It seems that the island may have been the origin of the populations of white-cheeked bulbul and Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica* now present on Jebel Dhanna on the mainland opposite, as the island populations were a distribution pocket with no contact with populations further east. Also the Egyptian goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* populations in the lower Arabian Gulf appear to have originated from the island (*Phoenix* 6: 1). Some of the species, like the many other introductions to Arabia, could fill vacant niches and not be a threat to indigenous species. For example if the human population accepted peafowl and left them unmolested, it could possibly establish itself in gardens and palm groves/orchards in some parts of the UAE and is unlikely to be a competitor to local birds. We have no idea of what other birds might mingle with local birds without ill effect. Could the UAE environment accept any more game birds? The grey francolin is spreading up the western coastlands of the Arabian Gulf, with some assistance from man and now inhabits parts of Qatar, Bahrain and Eastern Saudi Arabia. There were no game birds in these areas previously and the species is in any event arguably a naturally occurring species in the UAE. But could the spurfowls find a niche beside the existing francolins and do they represent any threat to them? The see see partridge seems much more of a potential problem. Would its escape to the hills of the UAE be at the expense of populations of its indigenous congener the sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*. Similarly the chukar stocks on the islands are almost certainly not the same genetic stock as the tiny population found in Musandam and any escapes which then breed with Musandam birds would mean a dilution of that genetic stock.

So far in Arabia there have been no instances of introduced birds ousting or seriously competing with indigenous species for food, nesting sites or habitat but with 30 or more exotic species now breeding in Arabia one could say we have got enough. Whilst some might argue that a few exotics in Arabia are acceptable, if we want to avoid the huge and permanent problems that have been caused by careless introductions in various parts of the world, for example ruddy duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*, house crow *Corvus splendens*, mink, and rabbits, we must keep all non-native animals securely under lock and key.

Michael C Jennings and Dave Robinson Holystone House, Holystone, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7AJ.

Fig 4. In May 1994 African silverbill *Euodice cantans* were observed at Thamud, western Arabia (FA28 and GA26), equalling the northernmost records of the species (J-O Hedin).

Bani Yazid, Hejaz mountains

Near the village of Bani Yazid (HA17) in the Hejaz mountains of Saudi Arabia lies an easily accessible but unspoilt part of the western Arabian escarpment. This site offers and excellent range of montane species and many of the southwestern specialties, without the need to traverse remote highland tracks in a four wheel drive vehicle. The area is of great natural beauty and the top of the escarpment (at 2,000 m) offers superb panoramic views and decent raptor viewing. The site lies 18.2 km north of the large mosque in the centre of the town of Mandaq, about 30 km south of Jebel Ibrahim.

Like many parts of these mountains the disused terraced fields offer a habitat rich in flowers and herbs and a parkland of acacia, juniper and some *ficus* trees. The escarpment being atop 200 m cliffs makes an excellent viewing platform.

Five Arabian endemics are found in the area, Arabian woodpecker *Dendrocopos dorae*, Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, Arabian serin *Serinus rothschildi*, Yemen serin *Serinus menachensis* and Yemen linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*. Other specialties include South Arabian wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides*, little rock thrush *Monticola rufocinerea*, brown woodland warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, Gambage flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*, white-breasted white-eye

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Zosterops abyssinicus and golden-winged grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*. Raptors recorded at the site include Verreaux's eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, barbary falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*, black kite *Milvus migrans*, Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, and griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus* which probably breed at a small colony here. Other species that probably breed in the area are alpine swift *Apus melba*, hoopoe *Upupa epops*, red-rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica*, fan-tailed raven *Corvus rhipidurus*, Tristram's grackle *Onychognathus tristramii* and amethyst starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*. Other wildlife includes Hamadryas baboon and several Afrotropical butterflies.

There are plenty of opportunities for camping in the area. The best times of the day to visit are early morning and late afternoon because mists often roll up the escarpment during midday making observations and conditions less pleasant.

Dr Graham R Lobley, Villa 14, Lotus 1 Housing Compound, P O Box 8423, Jeddah 21482, Saudi Arabia.

ABBA Survey 15 to Northern Oman, Winter 1993/94

I wanted to visit Northern Oman to get a first hand impression of the mountains and bird habitats there, as background for the ABBA project. I had the opportunity to make a visit just after Christmas 1993. Although mid-winter is not the best time for a breeding bird survey in northern Oman, I was able to collect many useful 'presence' records of potentially breeding birds for the ABBA database, as well as obtain information on the early breeding season activity of a few species.

My companion during the first two weeks of the survey was Carol Qirreh. The route taken and places visited can be seen on the accompanying map. Positioning was from 100,000 scale military survey maps and a hand held GPS receiver. Altitude was measured by a pocket altimeter.

Altogether 31 ABBA squares were visited but coverage varied greatly. Relatively more time and energy was spent in the highlands and foothills than on the coast or the southern desert fringes of the highlands. In nine of the squares visited 16 or more potential breeding species were recorded. In the squares containing the Sayq plateau (XB23) and Jebel Shams (XA23), 26 and 25 potential breeding birds were found respectively. These last two squares were already well covered but I was surprised that in the Sayq plateau square I obtained presence records for no less than nine species which were not previously recorded on the ABBA database for that square. Other 'land locked' squares with 16 or more species were WA25 (mountains between Sohar and al Buraymi) and ZA21 (north east of the Wahiba sands), where I found, respectively, nine and 13 previously unrecorded species. There were 14 further squares with nine or more potential breeding species. Generally speaking the further I got from Muscat, the more relatively common species I found which had not been previously reported to ABBA for a particular square. Squares around Dank and Yanqul were particularly rewarding and in one or two squares almost all the land birds seen were new to the ABBA database. Especially fruitful were short visits to those coastal squares which contain only a small wedge of land for example WB26, ZA23 and ZB20. I had no particularly startling or extralimital records of breeding birds during the survey but the extra 'presence' records that I obtained filled in a lot of gaps in the *Interim Atlas* maps. *(Continued on Page 6)*

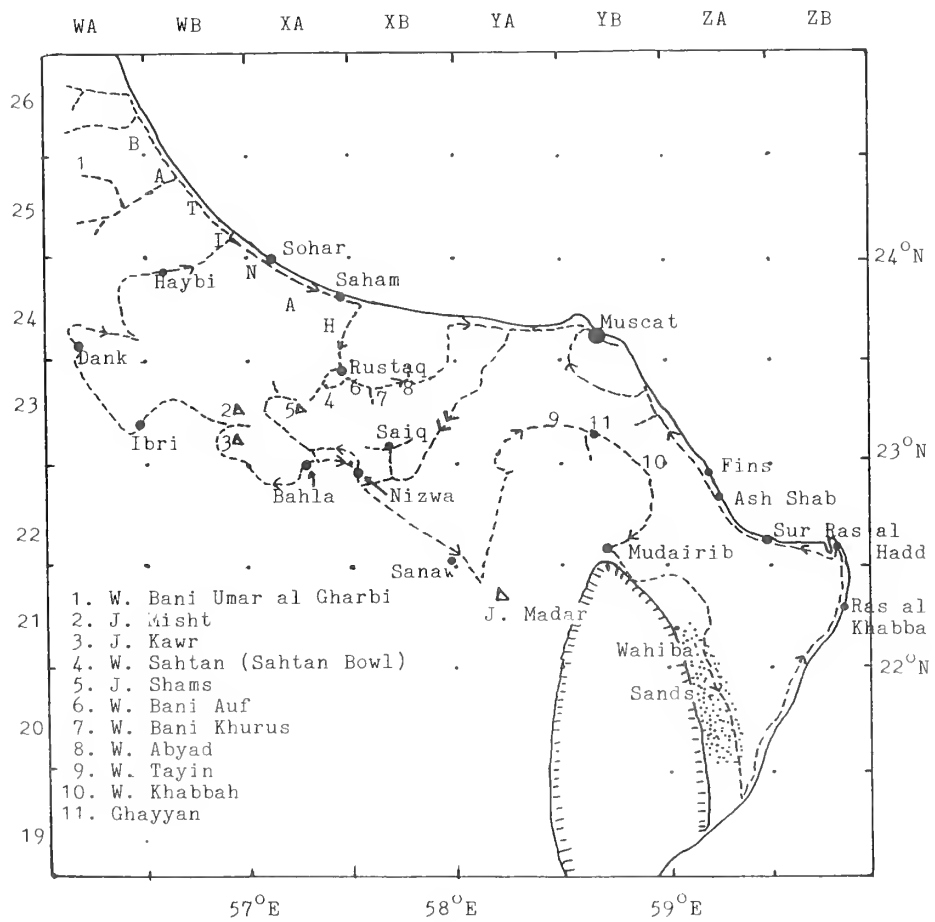


Fig 5. Route taken (broken line) on ABBA Survey 15 to Northern Oman December 1993 - January 1994. The ABBA square reference can be read from the top and left hand scales. The shaded area to the east of the Wahiba Sands is Ghaf *(Prosopis)* woodland.

In addition to spatial records for the ABBA database I made ten simple transect censuses of common birds present in a variety of habitats. These transects were all carried out at dawn over a half hour period, all birds seen or heard were counted, including visitors. These transect counts are aimed at roughly assessing the abundance of common species. Not surprisingly the commonest species recorded on these transects were yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* (17 birds on 8 censuses), palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (16 on 4 censuses) and desert lark *Ammomanes deserti* (9 on 4 censuses). Of the visitors the most numerous were desert lesser whitethroat *Sylvia minula* (16 on 7 censuses) and chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (26 on 6 censuses).

In addition to the ABBA survey tasks I made a small contribution to the Asian seabird and waterbird mid-winter census for 1993/94. Five small sites were counted; a total of 4268 birds of 30 species were recorded.

A systematic list of all birds recorded during the survey was prepared and a copy of that list and all ABBA record sheets and seabird counts were forwarded to the Oman Bird Recorder.

A selected list of some of the observations (not just breeding birds) follows. A narrative account of the survey which includes more details of places visited is available on application.

Red-billed tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*
One before dawn, Ras al khabba (ZB21), 14 January.

Great white egret *Egretta alba*
Six ash Shab lagoons, 14 January and one Dibab, 15 January.

White stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Four soaring over Batinah cultivation (WB25), 6 January.

Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
Present in small numbers almost all areas visited. Counts of 28 Wadi Abyad (XB23), 8 January and 75, Ghayyan rubbish tip, 11 January.

Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*
Up to three birds on eight occasions, Saiq plateau (2000 m), Wadi Ghul, Jebel Misht (not positively identified), Sohar/Buraimi road (WA25), Wadi Bani Kharus (XB23), Jebel Madar, Wadi Tayin and Mintirib.

Long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
One near Bilad Bani Bu Hasan, 12 January.

Imperial eagle *Aquila heliaca*
One Ghayyan rubbish tip, 11 January.

Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
One Jebel Madar, 10 January.

Bonelli's eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*
One near al Ayn (WB23), 2 January. A pair were observed in a wadi over a period of about an hour, east of Jebel Hatta (WA26), 4 January.

Arabian red-legged partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*
Calling early morning Saiq plateau, 29 December, two Wadi Duwaykilah (Saiq plateau) 30 December, heard Jebel Shams, 31 December.

White breasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
One Wadi Bani Umar al Gharbi, 6 January.

Great black-headed gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
Numerous on the coast ZA19 to ZB22. A total of approximately 1000, 13 January.

Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*
Four or five over mangroves Sur khor, 14 January.

Sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Numerous all coastal localities.

Saunder's little tern *Sterna saundersi*
Eight roosting on beach with other terns and gulls near Ras al Hadd, 14 January.

Wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*
An old nest apparently belonging to this species (with a wood pigeon feather underneath) Saiq plateau, 29 December. One cooing Wadi Duwaykilah, 30 December and three or four cooing Sahtan bowl (above 2000 m), 7 January.

Little owl *Athene noctua*
Singles calling Saiq plateau and Sahtan bowl and a pair dueting Jebel Shams (2200 m).

Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*
Extremely common on the Batinah. 75 counted whilst driving along 50 km of the main road (near Sohar). Elsewhere quite common in cultivated areas, including east of the Wahiba sands, but not found in the highlands above about 1000 m.

Long-billed pipit *Anthus similis*
One Wadi Ghul at 1450 m, 1 January and one (singing) Wadi Rajmah 500 m, 5 January.

Hooded wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*
One Wadi Abyad 5 January, one near Sanaw 10 January and three Wadi Tayin/Wadi Khabbah, 11 January.

Plain leaf warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus*
Individuals Saiq plateau (2000 m), 29 December and one Wadi Khabbah, 12 January.

House crow *Corvus splendens*
Extremely common on the Batinah becoming less numerous eastwards. The easternmost records were at Dibab (ZA23).

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*
Two males and one or two females Wadi Bani Habib, Saiq plateau, 30 December. One possible female upper Wadi Ghul (2000 m), 1 January and one probable female north of Dank (WA24), 3 January.

Carol and I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Ralph Daly the Adviser for Conservation of the Environment, who

provided a very great deal of help, especially a 4-wheel drive vehicle, petrol coupons, maps and the loan of camping equipment. We are also indebted to Ian McLeish the Assistant Adviser for Conservation who gave much logistic help and took us to the Saiq plateau. At Saiq we received help and advice from Hilal al Hosnie, the military/civilian liaison officer and Bill Rix who also provided some accommodation. Jens Eriksen and Michael Gallagher provided help and many ideas for the survey. *MCJ*

Fig 6. A juvenile water rail *Rallus aquaticus* was seen in the western UAE (SB25), in May 1995 (S. Aspinall). First UAE breeding.

New Books:

The aim of this section is to give details of new publications which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia, or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned.

Alternatively, all the titles reviewed in this issue and earlier *Phoenix* issues may be ordered through Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd, Treuddyn, Nr Mold, Clwyd, North Wales, CH7 4LN, UK. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

Birds in Bahrain, a study of their migration patterns 1990 - 1992 by Erik Hirschfeld (1995)

This review of birds in Bahrain over a three year period is an excellent supplement to the Nightingale & Hill *Birds of Bahrain* published in 1993 (See *Phoenix* 10:9). Although Bahrain is only a small island with a very limited number of breeding birds it is in the middle of the Africa/Eurasia migration zone and observations on the island give an important perspective on migration for the whole of the Arabian/Middle East region. Introductory sections cover the description of various sites on Bahrain and Muharraq Islands where the counts and migration observations recorded in the book were carried out. There are also short notes on the hunting of birds on the island which is still a significant threat to certain species. The main part of the book is devoted to species accounts, 250 species were observed by the author in the period concerned. Each species account is made up of two paragraphs, one detailing the records of birds observed in the period and the second gives its general status on the island and nearby in Eastern Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and other parts of the Arabian Gulf. Comment is made on the sub-species occurring on Bahrain where identified. The species accounts are supplemented by graphs, tables and histograms providing analysis of records either by month, year, or throughout the period. Appendices include an important checklist of all the birds of Bahrain which now stands at 303. The text is illustrated with line drawings.

Card covers, 124 pages (A5 size). Price £8 (post free). Published by Hobby Publications, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE. ISBN 1-872839-03-7.

A Birdwatchers Guide to Qatar by Christine & John Oldfield (1994)

This is the first book to be published on the birds of Qatar. It is very much a personal narrative by the authors of what birds can be seen in Qatar, when and where. There are some 30 or so breeding birds recorded for the state and it is interesting that a number have experienced a range extension in recent years. Several of the breeding birds have been introduced to Qatar in the last couple of decades. There are chapters for each season illustrating the birds that may be found. There are notes on birding locations both near the capital city, Doha and further afield, including along the coast. Many of the site locations are supported by sketch maps showing how to get there, distances etc. This section will be particularly useful to residents in the Arabian Gulf who want to see a few more of the birds of Qatar and also to short term visitors who are unable to get the assistance of someone with local knowledge to personally take them around. The booklet is completed by a checklist of all the birds which have occurred in Qatar showing their status, commonality and the months of occurrence. Scientific names are not used, which is a pity as this would have been helpful to non-English readers examining the checklist. Recommended for

birdwatchers visiting Qatar. Illustrated by maps and line drawings and some (not very good) colour paintings.

Card covers, 101 pages (A5). Price 50 Qatar Riyals from the Family Bookshop Doha, Qatar. Also available price £6 plus post and packing, from the authors at 21 Learmouth Gardens, Edinburgh EH4 1HA, Scotland. ISBN 99921-65-10-3.

Birds of the Riyadh Region (Second edition) by Arthur Stagg (1994)

Birdwatching must be the only interest that can be followed anywhere in the world, at any time, regardless of what other activities one is occupied with, be it merely walking down the street, a family holiday or business trip. It helps to have the basic accoutrements of binoculars and an identification guide. After this the biggest need is to have a guide of which birds can be seen locally and where to find the best bird sites. Arthur Stagg performed this function with his first Riyadh guide, which appeared in 1987. He has now fully updated the guide and added some 36 species to the Riyadh list since the last edition which now stands at 311. Riyadh more than any other part of Arabia has been totally transformed in terms of the birds to be found there in the last two or three decades. The very many irrigated fields now to be found there, gardens, parks etc, provide numerous additional niches for birds to exploit and the "Riyadh river", an extensive artificial water course unique in Arabia, has provided a range of rich water habitats previously unavailable in Arabia. This habitat is exploited by increasing numbers of species and since 1987 even fish-eating herons has been added to the list of local breeding birds. Visitors especially will want to see the Riyadh river and the book provides information on where one can watch birds along its course. The systematic list provides an overview of the status and occurrence, including months of passage etc, of all species that have been recorded within central Arabia. For unusual records or for rare species, details of date/locality of individual records are provided including the observer or published source. Appendices include a list of the excluded species, those species for which some doubt exists about their occurrence, and for references and indexes. Illustrated by 16 colour plates of bird sites in the Riyadh region and of local birds. An excellent introductory guide. Recommended.

Card covers, 77 pages (171 x 235 mm). Price £4 or 20 Saudi Riyals. Available from the NCWCD, PO Box 61681, Riyadh 11575, Saudi Arabia. Orders should be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope.

The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan by I J Andrews (1995)

The first impression one gets of this excellent guide is that it very closely resembles in format, layout and size the UAE Guide by Colin Richardson. Colin's guide is acknowledged in the text as the author's model for this Jordan work. It covers all subjects relative to Jordan's birds except identification, which it quite rightly leaves to the field guides. There are introductions to Jordan and its birds, climate, geology, vegetation etc. Then the avifaunal regions into which the country can be divided are discussed with descriptions of habitat types, birds to be found in them and 30 or more colour plates to illustrate the habitats.

Fig 7. Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*. One of the excellent illustrations by John Busby appearing in *The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*.

The species accounts complete the large part of the book covering the status of each and their commonality, information on passage data as well as historical records and a little bit of information on nest site etc where appropriate. There are small breeding distribution maps of most of the 140 plus birds that breed. Apart from the scientific names, names of each bird are given in English, Arabic and German. Migration charts show the period by which migrants and visitors are to be found. There is a very useful set of birdwatching site guides and maps which will be a great encouragement for birders to visit the Kingdom and to enjoy its birds. One very valuable part is a complete checklist of all the birds of Jordan, which many Middle East enthusiasts will like to have. It is interesting to see that this list includes the single examples of Audouin's and glaucous gulls both in the Gulf of Akaba. These birds are interesting because, although only single examples of each were collected in 1914, they now appear on the national lists of four countries, Jordan, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Is this a record? There are also sections on conservation and the environment. Appendices include a bibliography, gazetteer and indexes of names and places. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this book are the distribution maps which show a dozen or more breeding species which have never occurred in Arabia proper, for example tawny owl, Syrian woodpecker, wren, great tit, jay, hooded crow, rock sparrow, Tristram's serin and linnet. There are at least another dozen species which regularly breed in Jordan which do not do so in the rest of the Arabian peninsula. This is an excellent book well illustrated by some 85 black and white line drawings by John Busby and nearly 130 photographs of birds mostly by the author. Recommended.

Laminated card cover, 217 pages (150 x 225 mm). Price £18.50 plus postage. Published by the author, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselborough, Midlothian, EH21 6UW Scotland UK. ISBN 09524978-0-8.

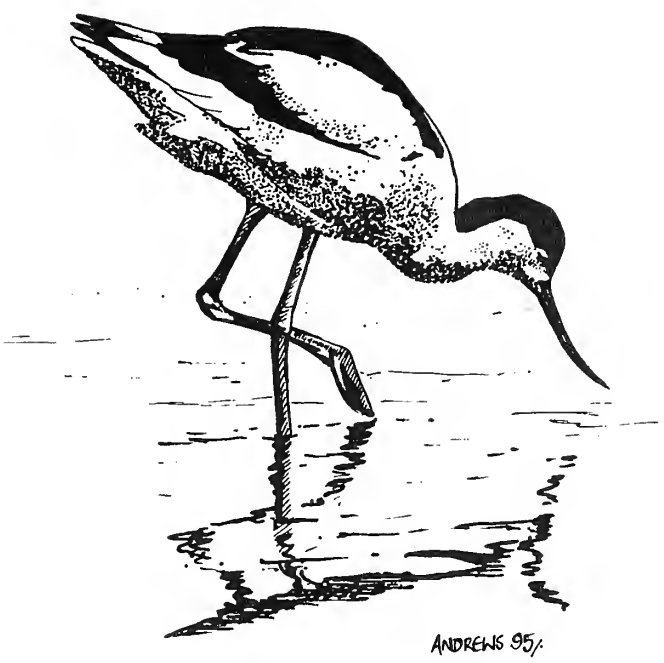


Fig 8. More than a hundred occupied nests of avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* were found at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia, in May 95 (P Symens).

Whales and Dolphins along the Coast of Oman by Robert Baldwin and Rod Salm (1994)

This book is exciting as it fills a big hole on the Arabian zoological library shelf. Although specifically about Oman and thus southern Arabia, it is relevant to all the seas around Arabia as marine mammals are mobile and theoretically could occur as far as the northern parts of the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. None of the previous works that have dealt with Arabian mammals have considered marine mammals in any detail so the authors have broken new ground with this title. In fact it is likely that they have created a new hobby for many as, for the first time, a book is available which tells when and where to find marine mammals, how to watch them and how to identify them. Oman has a quarter of the 80 species of whales and dolphins that are known worldwide. However this group of animals has only been studied a relatively short time locally and it is more than likely that several other species will turn up in Arabian waters. Indeed the books suggests it is quite possible that there will be new species identified for science from the region. There are short notes on other marine mammals and it is interesting to learn that the southern elephant seal of Antarctica, has been recorded in Oman and that other seals are known to have occurred. In the species descriptions animals are illustrated by a photograph and artwork. The narrative provides information on how to distinguish each species, diagnostic points, size, colour, as well as habits and behaviour including group/family size, habitat and approachability. There are also notes on distribution and status in Oman and throughout the world. Short notes are provided on the continued threats to these beautiful animals and finally details of how to record and report sightings of them. Highly recommended.

Laminated card cover, 65 pages (145 x 210 mm); Price £8.99. Published by Robert Baldwin and distribnted by The NHBS Ltd, 2-3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK.

The Red Sea by David Doubilet and Andrea Ghisotti (1994)

This is a large format photo album of the underwater life of the Red Sea. It is in full colour from end to end and reproduces some remarkable images of corals, turtles, invertebrates, fish, and inevitably sharks. All inhabiting the reefs of the African side of the Red Sea from Sinai to the Dahlac archipelago. The photos often cover both pages of an opening, producing a faithful impression of the fantastic life, colour and variety that is the Red Sea. The narrative is kept to a minimum, about one page of text to about four or five pages of colour photographs, and is a personal account of the authors experience of the Red Sea idyll, their favourite dives, reefs, islands and wildlife behaviour. Wrecks are explored where cargoes range from roman amphorae to munitions ships of the Second World War. This is one of those books that makes every reader want to rush out buy a set diving equipment and head off to the tropics.

Hard back, 160 pages (370 x 280 mm). Price £25. Available from Swan Hill Press, 101 Longden Road, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 9EB. ISBN 1853105120.

Red Sea Diving Guide by A Ghisotti and A Carletti (1994)

The Red Sea is the closest tropical sea to Europe and the ideal destination for SCUBA divers from there. It has traditionally been the focus of European undersea research since the pioneering work of Hans Haas and Jacques Cousteau in the 1950's. It is probably also the most written about underwater locality of the world. This is an unusual guide, probably the first book of its kind for the enthusiast planning a diving itinerary to the area. It includes information on where to go and what to do and see whilst there. Everything one needs to know about diving in the Red Sea. The western coast of the Red Sea has a reasonably good infrastructure for both organised and casual marine tourists although it has to be said that facilities become less and less sophisticated or reliable as one travels south from the Gulf of Aqaba and northern Egypt to Sudan and Eritrea. This book is primarily an overview of the finest dives in the western half of the Red Sea (it ignores the Arabian side). Each dive guide provides an underwater route, including a three dimensional drawing of the complete dive. A typical dive covers two pages which includes a local map and general position within the Red Sea, as well as a detailed plan of a suggested dive, routes, features to look out for at each depth, fish and other wildlife to be encountered. The dive narratives are supported by photographs of what lives there, wrecks and so on. Introductory sections deal with diving, photography, equipment and dangers from fish and coral. The main part of the book is an account of 27 dives in Israel, Egypt, Sudan and the Dahlac islands of Eritrea. Each country has a short introductory paragraph of local facilities. The book is rounded up with a selection of 110 species of fish, illustrated by colour artwork representing the 1000 or more species found in the Red Sea. For each there are notes on colour, size, habitats and habits.

Laminated card cover, 128 pages (290 x 210 mm). Price £16.95. Published by Swan Hill Press, 101 Longden Road, Shrewsbury SY3 9EB, England. ISBN 1-85310553-8.

Snorkelling & Diving in Oman by Rod Salm and Robert Baldwin (1992)

If one considers that two thirds of the world's surface is covered by the oceans and only a tiny number of people ever visit even a fraction of that underwater realm, one can imagine that a great deal is left to be discovered in the marine environment. This book is about discovering small parts of the Arabian undersea environment with flippers and goggles. A theme running through this guide is that damage is being done by even the very few visitors to this environment, highlighting how extremely fragile an ecosystem it is. For example, years of coral growth can be damaged by the single clumsy dropping of an anchor. The book chronicles some of the better known diving sites along the coast of Oman, providing details of their location, how to get there and what to look for once underwater. There are hints on choosing and using snorkelling gear, how to snorkel and diving clubs, operators and suppliers in the region. Thirty or more main sites from Musandam to Dhofar are covered. Information is given on getting there, depths at which one should dive, the season to visit and descriptions of special features and wildlife that may be found on each dive. There are details of local problems, for example restricted access, difficult currents, or other dangers. Simple sketch maps show the general location of each site. Appendices cover where to buy equipment and where to get it serviced in Oman and the names of corals, invertebrates, fish, turtles, whales and dolphins that are mentioned in the text. The book is illustrated throughout by photographs of fish, wrecks, turtles and other marine subjects. It is one in the Arabian Heritage Guide series of Motivate Publishing.

Wire bound card covers, 88 pages (145 x 210 mm). Available from Motivate Publishing, London House, 26/40 Kensington High Street, Loudon, W8 4PF or PO Box 2331, Dubai, UAE. ISBN 1-873544-54-5.

Indexed Bibliography of Natural History and Conservation in Oman by Martin Fisher (1995)

This bibliography lists works on natural history, conservation and associated topics for Oman. It brings together for the first time a bibliography that includes journal and newsletter articles, books, reports and theses for Oman. It appears not to be totally comprehensive in that it does not include all the wealth of smaller papers, for example those found in *Oman Bird News*. A short introduction deals with literature sources for the bibliography, a summary of major reference works and natural history guides that cover Oman. There is also a list of the names and addresses of organisations, journals and newsletters relevant to the study of the natural history of Oman. An index of 343 key-words cross refers to the numbered references and the bibliography gives full citation details (including a list of associated key-words) of 865 titles. Besides works on conservation, ecology, marine biology, natural history and systematics, the bibliography includes a selection of background articles on relevant aspects of climate, geology, hydrology, palaeoclimate, pastoralism, sediments and the southwest monsoon. Recommended to everyone interested in research of natural history and conservation in Oman.

Card cover, 74 pages (160 x 240 mm). Price NLG 42,00 (approx £16.80) plus postage and 6% VAT). Published by Backhuys Publishers, PO Box 321, 2300 AH Leiden, Holland. ISBN 90-73348-41-2.

The 1991 Gulf War Environmental Assessment of IUCN and Collaborators by A R G Price et al (1994)

This report summarises the results of the various environmental assessment studies of the IUCN and its collaborators carried out following the 1991 Gulf War. The Gulf War brought deliberate spillage of an estimated 6-8 million barrels of oil, by far the largest oil pollution incident ever. In addition 600 oil wells were set on fire, the consequent damage to terrestrial and marine wildlife was potentially enormous. Other impacts of the war included the destruction of sewage treatment works, which spilt some 50,000 cubic metres of raw sewage into the northern Arabian Gulf. The report sets out the major findings of each of several important studies that followed the incident, including examination of sea water, reefs, shrimp fisheries, marine ecosystems, fish communities and numerous other subjects. Since 1991 much of the oil has dispersed or degraded although there is still considerable contamination of the littoral and benthic zones. In many areas the most important realisation was that there was no precise baseline on which to compare the effects of the various pollution incidents and for this reason the long-term effects are also difficult and illusive to predict. However what was certain was that the Gulf War has highlighted the importance and vulnerability of the Gulf's marine environment.

Card covers 61 pages, (A4). Price not known. Available from IUCN Publications Services Unit, 219C Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL. ISBN 2-8317-0205-4.

Fig 9. A grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* nest containing seven eggs, found in the UAE (VB25) during May 1995 by Patrick Bergier, was the first nest and nest site of the species described in a report to ABBA.

left. To enable easy cross-referencing to other maps the map overleaf also shows the latitude (°N) on the right and longitude (°E) along the bottom. Note that it is the co-ordinates of the south-west corner of the square that identify the Square Reference. For example square LB27 is bordered on the south by 25°N and to the west by 45½°E; UA25 is 24°N and 54°E; and 16½°N, 41½°E is HB10.

The report form for observers' records is Form 3 and a supply is enclosed with these instructions. Current contributors are asked to complete and return copies of Form 3 after each breeding season. The breeding season will of course vary according to region and habitat but generally for Palearctic landbirds it is February to May, and during this time the most useful work can be done. In some areas and for some species, breeding can occur all the year round. If observers are likely to remain in an area for any length of time it is recommended that they complete copies of Form 3 in pencil as information will almost certainly be updated as the season progresses. Only the highest BEC for each species square is needed actually on the Form 3 but details of nesting progress, or of other confirmed breeding occurrences of the same species in the same square, would be valued in the form of additional notes on the back of the form. (The sample completed Form 3 enclosed gives some idea of the type of extra notes that would be welcomed). Contributors may find it useful to keep photocopies of report forms submitted so as to avoid too much duplication in subsequent years but also to highlight which squares or species need to receive attention in later seasons. Further notes on the completion of the report form may be found on the reverse of Form 3. Additional comments about completing the report forms also appear in *The Phoenix* newsletter from time to time.

If you are unable to reproduce copies locally extra forms are available on request. Please copy these papers to others who may be interested in the scheme.

Access, co-operation and credits

A project like the Arabia Atlas involves a great many contributors reporting over a long period. In such circumstances it is only proper that as many people as possible, especially contributors, should benefit from the information collected. The project co-operates with all institutions and individuals interested in the birds of the area. For example, contributors who are intending to publish their own observations can be provided with up to date details of the distribution of individual species or the birds occurring in finite areas. (The project has already made significant contributions to many scientific papers and ongoing conservation projects.) A close working relationship is sought with all natural history groups active in Arabia and with their ornithological recorders, so that benefits may accrue to all parties. All information passed on will, wherever possible, be properly credited to the original observer.

The keynote of the project is therefore one of co-operation, with contributors, if they wish, being able to get as much information out of the scheme as they put in. Periodic summaries are published of records collected and *Phoenix* will keep those taking part in contact and provide information and news. Contributors may, if they wish, place any reasonable publicity embargo on their records, for example to protect the site of a rare nesting species or when they wish to publish their own work exclusively. However, undue secrecy is to be avoided if possible as often the publication of a species breeding outside its normal range inspires others to seek further breeding evidence in nearby squares.

FORM 1

Michael C Jennings
Co-ordinator

1 Warners Farm
Warners Drove
Somersham
Cambridgeshire
PE17 3HW
England

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

Introduction

The ABBA project aims to provide a comprehensive account of the distribution and status of bird species breeding within the Arabian Peninsula.

In common with most of the several other ornithological atlas schemes which are in progress in the Middle East and Africa, the Arabian atlas has the half degree square as its unit of survey. This format has been found to be the most practical basis for large, under-recorded areas because no special maps are needed, contributors being able to work from local road maps. The Arabian Peninsula extends to 21 degrees of latitude and 26 degrees of longitude. There are over 1,100 half degree squares in the atlas area, of a relatively uniform size; from about 55 x 56km at Aden to about 48 x 55km at Kuwait. The atlas squares are shown on pages 2 and 3.

ABBA fieldwork commenced in 1984. A concurrent programme was started in that year to review all the relevant literature and examine museum specimens to extract relevant data from those sources. Efforts are also being made to find all previous observers with unpublished records. NB Records prior to 1984 are especially valuable.

Advice to contributors

A valuable contribution to the atlas can be made by every ornithologist or birdwatcher resident in or visiting Arabia, and by all those who have records of previous observations in the Peninsula.

The atlas database is being built up from three main record elements: these are the species, the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) and the Square Reference. There are over 200 breeding species and these are listed on Form 2, enclosed with these instructions. The Breeding Evidence Code is based on the 17 point system developed by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee and now widely used by many other ornithological atlas schemes. The code is slightly modified for ABBA purposes and is given on page 2. Each atlas square has a unique reference made up from the two letters of the axis along the top of the map and the two numerals from the axis on the

continued on page 4

Sponsor
National Commission for Wildlife
Conservation and Development (NCWCD)
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

اشراف
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية وإنمائها
الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

Atlas coverage

All the territories of the states of the Arabian Peninsula including their islands and permanent oil platforms etc, in the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea and Red Sea. This includes the Arabian Gulf Islands occupied by Iran since 1971, Socotra and the Abd el Kuri Islands, and the Egyptian administered islands of Tiran and Sinafir. The map has no political significance and it should be noted that many international boundaries, especially in southern parts of the peninsula, are ill-defined and in places disputed.

The Arabian Peninsula

Much of Arabia is arid desert but even deserts provide a variety of habitats. There is a rich range of other habitats including montane juniper forest, permanent water courses and coastal mangrove swamps. In recent years a host of manmade habitats have enabled species to breed that did not do so previously and others have been helped to extend their range through the influence of man. The avifauna is enriched further because Arabia stands at a pivotal position in respect of Old World zoogeography.

The peninsula is predominantly Palearctic but there is a very strong Afrotropical influence in the south west, whilst the east has a flavour of Oriental species. With this variety of habitat and influences on the avifauna a total of more than 200 species breed, or have bred. The atlas project will undoubtedly add many more species to the list of breeding birds and lead to a much greater understanding of the range and occurrence of each.

Finding a square

To refer to a square use the two letters in the axis along the top and the two numbers in the axis on the left. These equate to the co-ordinates of the south west corner of the square, eg UA25 is the square bounded by 24°N to the south and 54°E to the west. The largest scale map available should be consulted by contributors to identify accurately each square visited.

BREEDING EVIDENCE CODE

The following Breeding Evidence Codes are those to be shown in column 4 of Form 3.

Present

XX Highly sedentary species observed at any time (applies only to those species identified on Form 2).

0 Species observed in the breeding season.

Possibly breeding

1 Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.

2 Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in the breeding season.

Probably breeding

3 Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.

4 Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc) on at least two different days, a week or more apart, at the same place.

5 Display and courtship.

6 Visiting probable nest-site.

7 Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adult(s).

8 Brood patch on adult examined in the hand, indicating probably incubating.

9 Building nest or excavating nest-hole.

Confirmed breeding

10 Distraction display or injury feigning.

11 Used nest or egg shell found.

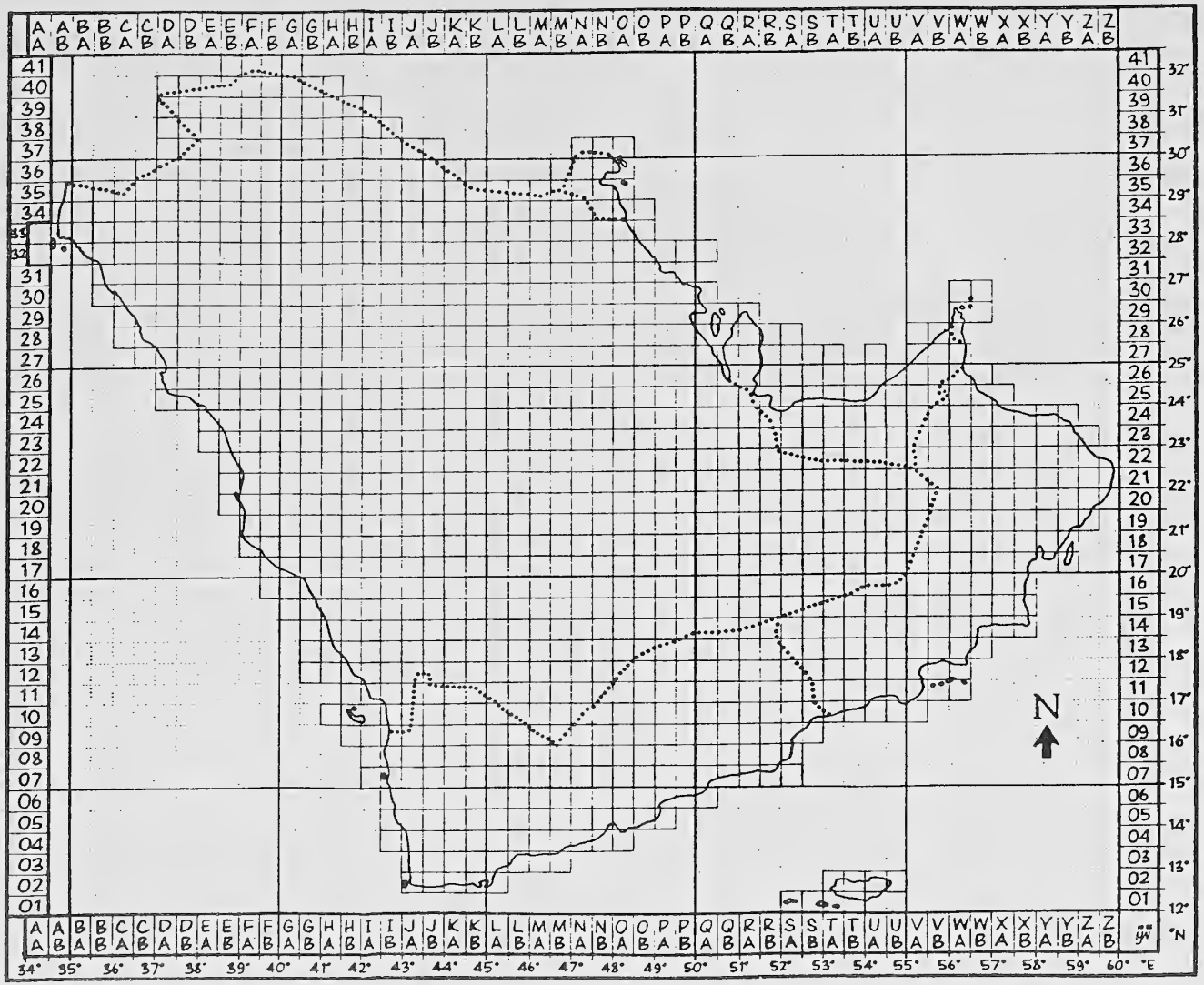
12 Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species).

13 Adult(s) entering or leaving nest site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adult(s) seen sitting on the nest.

14 Adult(s) carrying food for young or faecal sac.

15 Nest containing eggs.

16 Nest with young seen or heard.



ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA FORM 3

Observer's Report Sheet

See notes overleaf

Observer	Country
Observer's Reference	Period covered by report

Office Use	Acc No	Key Codes	C	D

1 Species name	2 Species Code	3 Square Ref	4 BEC	5 Date (day, month, year)	6 Remarks *(continue overleaf)*	7 Leave blank
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EXAMPLE OF COMPLETED FORM

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA FORM 3

Observer's Report Sheet

See notes overleaf

Observer	Country
ANDREW SMITH	SAUDI ARABIA
Observer's Reference: AS|91|1	Period covered by report: 1 Feb – 30 Sept 1994

LEAVE BLANK →

Office Use	Acc No	Key Codes	C	D

1 Species name	2 Species Code	3 Square Ref	4 BEC	5 Date (day, month, year)	6 Remarks *(continue overleaf)*	7 Leave blank
1 Egyptian Vulture	247	MA25	03	2.2.94	Pair also 20 & 25 January	
2 "	247	MA26	01	12.3.94		
3 Griffon Vulture	251	MA26	13	4.4.94	See note	
4 Long-legged Buzzard	288	MB25	11	6.6.94	See note	
5 Kestrel	304	MA25	01	1.5.94	♂ seen throughout May	
6 Barbary Falcon	321	MA25	00	3.6.94		
7 "	321	MB26	07	12.4.94		
8 Sand Partridge	363	MA25	01	1.7.94		
9 "	363	MB25	XX	30.8.94		
10 "	363	MB26	XX	7.8.94	Covey of 9	
11 Cream C Courser	464	NA26	15	3.4.94	2 eggs	
12 Hypocolins	?	MB26	05	21.4.94	See note	
13 Arabian Babbler	1379	MA25	12	1.4.94	2 very young juvs in party of 8.	
14 Great G. Shrike	1520	MA26	16	3.3.94	See note	
15 "	1520	MA25	03	4.4.94	Song 26.3.94.	
16 "	1520	MB25	02	21.2.94		
17 Common Mynah	1587	MB26	06	17.4.94	See note	
18 House Sparrow	1591	MB26	09	20.3.94		
19 "	1591	MA26	01	22.3.94		
20 "	1591	KA26	01	20.4.94		
21 Brown-necked Raven	1571	MA25	16	23.3.94	See note	
22 Trumpeter Finch	1676	MB25	00	28.1.94	Flock of 200	
23 "	1676	MA25	08	16.4.94	Pairs and singing	
24 "	1676	MA26	01	19.5.94	♀ with brood patch	
25 "	1676	MB26	14	26.4.94		

Notes

a Observers may place their own sheet identifying mark in the space provided to permit future ease of reference.

b Species should, if possible, be arranged in the order of Form 2. The Species Code is the four digit number shown on that form, the Square Reference and the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) (XX and 0-16) are shown on Form 1. Only the highest BEC need be shown for each species/square but repeat information for all confirmed breeding occurrences (BEC 10-16), with notes of habitat, breeding period, nest site, clutch size, etc, would always be valued. Only show one record per line. Dates must be given in the format day/month/year, eg 14/06/91. Only give one date in column 5; extra information and dates can be given in the Remarks column or as a note on the reverse.

c The Remarks space (column 6) may be used to report brief comments on breeding or habitat, eg '3 eggs' or '40 pairs in colony'. More detailed notes should be made on the reverse, or in an accompanying note, cross referring to the appropriate line entry (1-25). Activities that are accurately described by the BEC definition need not be mentioned. Observers wishing to place any embargo on a record should mention this in the Remarks column.

It is recommended that ABBA Observer's Report Sheets should be copied to your local ornithological recorder, if one exists.

When complete this Report Sheet should be sent to -
Michael C Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE17 3HW, England

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Remarks *(continued from overleaf)*

Line 3: Griffon Vulture A small colony on the Tuwaiq Escarpment, about 5 pairs – nest sites spread along 200m of cliffs. Two birds sitting on nests on ledges and two others visited ledges where there were almost certainly nests. Locality visited regularly during April & May; 15 adults in air together at dusk on 26 April.

Line 4: Long-legged Buzzard Cliff nest site located only after young had left nest. (?Juvenile seen 1km to SW on 12 June possibly from this site). Pair regularly seen in area April & May. Under the nest were eggshells and remains of many lizards and a hare.

Line 12: Hypocolius Small parties present all winter. From early April some song heard and later aerial display by ♂♂. Last seen 29.4.94.

Line 14: Great Grey Shrike 3 naked young in nest in Acacia tortilis 1.5m above ground. Nest scruffily constructed of grasses and lined with feathers, wool & rags.

Line 17: Common Mynah Visiting presumed nest site in lamp post. No evidence to support breeding despite close watch over next few days.

Line 21: Brown-necked Raven Three nests found in this square:-
Nest 1: 23.3.94. 2 young (?4 days old) in acacia tree, 3m above ground level.
Nest 2: 28.2.94. 5 eggs, nest 25m up electricity pylon
Nest 3: 4.3.94 4 eggs, nest in acacia, 2m above ground level.

Notes

a Observers may place their own sheet identifying mark in the space provided to permit future ease of reference.

b Species should, if possible, be arranged in the order of Form 2. The Species Code is the four digit number shown on that form, the Square Reference and the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) (XX and 0-16) are shown on Form 1. Only the highest BEC need be shown for each species/square but repeat information for all confirmed breeding occurrences (BEC 10-16), with notes of habitat, breeding period, nest site, clutch size, etc, would always be valued. Only show one record per line. Dates must be given in the format day/month/year, eg 14/06/91. Only give one date in column 5, extra information and dates can be given in the Remarks column or as a note on the reverse.

c The Remarks space (column 6) may be used to report brief comments on breeding or habitat, eg '3 eggs' or '40 pairs in colony'. More detailed notes should be made on the reverse, or in an accompanying note, cross referring to the appropriate line entry (1-25). Activities that are accurately described by the BEC definition need not be mentioned. Observers wishing to place any embargo on a record should mention this in the Remarks column.

It is recommended that ABBA Observer's Report Sheets should be copied to your local ornithological recorder, if one exists.

When complete this Report Sheet should be sent to -
Michael C Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE17 3HW, England

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Remarks *(continued from overleaf)*

Desert Treks from Riyadh by Ionis Thompson (1994)

There are an increasing number of local guides for Arabia, describing how to find and get to interesting places. These allow residents and visitors alike to get the best out of the environment. This first guide to the Riyadh region is an excellent little book which opens up a part of Arabia which, to the first time observer, might appear a little uninteresting. Books like this are very relevant to birdwatchers and others interested in natural history as many of the sites are often good for observing wildlife. The book covers some 28 sites reachable from Riyadh in up to five hours and includes some longer weekend trips of three days or more. Information is provided on how to get there, including directions and distances, whether a two or four wheel drive vehicle is needed and what one can find, the significance of the site and its history. The text is supported by a number of excellent maps and diagrams and a collection of photographs that capture extremely well the atmosphere and wildness of Arabia. Recommended.

Card covers with a spiral wire binding, 86 pages (162 x 232 mm). Published by Stacey International, 128 Kensington Church Street, London, W8 4BH. ISBN 0905743768.

Journals Reports and other Publications

The aim of this note is to list some of the more interesting papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in local natural history newsletters and in other reports etc in Arabia in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the main papers listed regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc, appear in virtually all the periodicals mentioned.

Fauna of Saudi Arabia Vol 14 (1994)

Our knowledge of the fauna and flora of Arabia has increased tremendously in the last two decades. The *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* has been at the forefront of research concerning Arabian fauna in that time and in publishing scientific results since 1979. The *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* continues to carry the torch for scientific research in this latest volume. Within its 454 pages there are 21 papers split equally between invertebrates and vertebrates. The invertebrate papers include 11 on insects and are mainly taxonomic monographs, there is a single paper on scorpions which covers the new and poorly known species of Yemen. Nine of the papers on vertebrates cover marine fish and include a staggering 14 species described as new to science from Arabian waters. There are also long lists of species new to the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf. Two papers on reptiles concern new leaf-toed geckoes from Oman and the herpetofauna of southwest Arabia. The single paper on ornithology is a study of the avifauna of Wadi Turabah in the Hedjaz of western Saudi Arabia. The mountain chain of western Arabia has one of the richest avifaunas of any region of Arabia and Wadi Turabah is widely recognised as one of the best wadi systems in the Hedjaz/Asia range but at this time the wadi still does not have formal protected status. The study reports on observations in the wadi over the period 1991 to 1993 recording distribution, status and habitats. *Hard cover, 285 x 215 mm; price SF159. Published by the NCWCD Riyadh and Pro-entomologica c/o Natural History Museum, Basel, Switzerland. ISBN 3-7234-0014-0.*

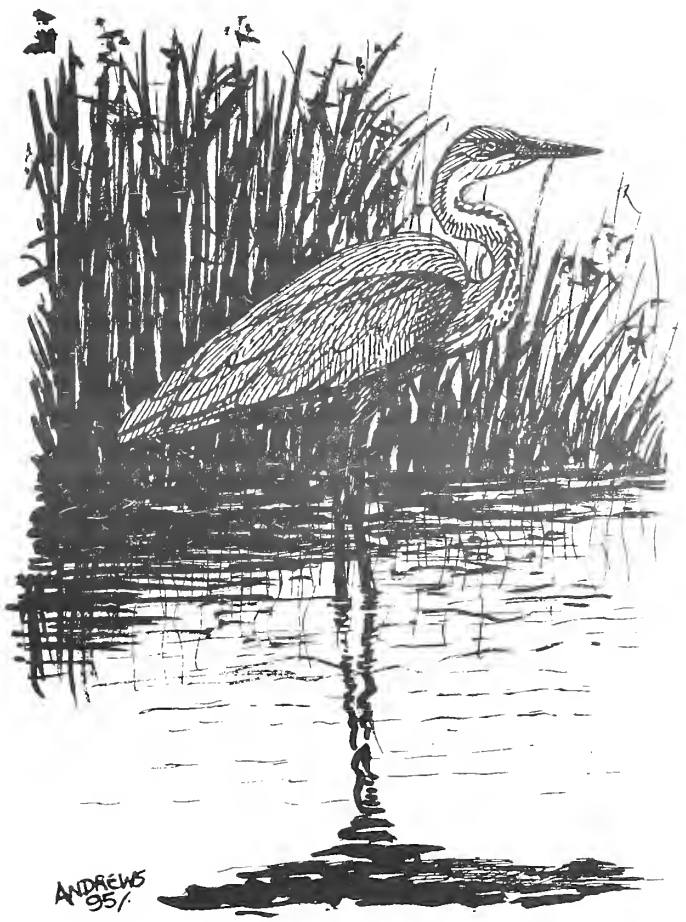

Fig 10. A pair of goliath herons *Ardea goliath* were observed at a nest site on Qusur Island (IB08), Red Sea coast of Yemen during March 1995 (R F Porter).

Zoology in the Middle East Vol 11 (1995)

Sixteen papers make up 120 pages of text, including eight articles on vertebrates, four of them concern birds. Only one paper relates to Arabian birds and concerns breeding observations of 11 species on the Yemen Tihamah (Red Sea coastal plain). Breeding for most of the Tihamah species commences March and April although evidence of an extended breeding season for guineafowl, palm dove and Rüppell's weaver is presented, including some autumn breeding. Information is provided on nest construction, egg laying period, nesting habitats and eggs for some species. Other papers concerning Arabia relate to the white-tailed and bushy-tailed mongooses in Yemen. There is a note on the cinereous bunting breeding on the island of Skyros Greece; a species that has been suggested might one day nest in the highlands of Arabia. *Soft cover A5 size, available from Max Kasparek Verlag, Bleichstrasse 1, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany. Price DM 27. ISSN 0939-7140.*

Journal of Saudi Arabian Natural History Society Vol 3 No 4 (Autumn 1993)

Despite the date this latest issue of the *Journal of Saudi Arabian Natural History Society* was not received until Spring 1995. This issue contains four articles on the history, ethnology and cultural heritage of Arabia. Unfortunately there is nothing directly related to the flora or fauna. Articles included concern Arab traders in the Indian ocean, a fisherman's life in the Red Sea, pastoralism in the Arabian peninsula and Turkish caravanserais along the Hedjaz railway. Soft covers, 58 pages, 275 x 212 mm. *Available from the SANHS c/o The Bursar, The Continental School, PO Box 6453, Jeddah 21442 Saudi Arabia.*

Arabian Wildlife

Volume 2 No 2 (1995) presents an overview of wildlife tourism opportunities in Arabia. There are special reports from every state of the peninsula and Jordan. National accounts provide details of particular habitats to be found and places to observe wildlife and some of the natural specialities of the region. In addition there is a fact sheet of local groups, contacts, travel agents and other useful addresses for each country. Feature articles deal with the birds in western Saudi Arabia, a humpback whale rescue and whale watching in Oman, the Harrat al Harrah reserve and articles on wildlife photography. *Magaziue, 50 pages, price £2.50. Published by Planet Publishing Ltd, (in conjunction with the NCWCD), 20 Berkeley Street, London W!X 5AE*

Oman Bird News

Issue No 17 (Winter 1994-95) contained articles on rare birds in Oman, Hume's Owl in Dhofar, birds in the central desert region and various shorter notes including details of some recent ringing recoveries. *Available from Oman Bird Group, c/o Natural History Museum, PO Box 668, Muscat, Oman.*

Tribulus

The October 1994 issue (Vol. 4, No. 2) contained six main articles, four of which were archaeological. There were two papers of interest to bird people; one a note on the sooty falcon in the UAE. This species is confined to the islands in the seas surrounding Arabia and inland sites in the Sahara, and northern Arabia. The paper presents a summary of findings in the UAE which holds important numbers of this regionally threatened species. However a comprehensive survey of the species occurrence in the Arabian Gulf is awaited. The second article concerns the oil spill off the east coast of the UAE in April 1994, which thankfully did not have any major harmful impact on either the fragile and important mangrove habitats in the region or seabirds. Vol. 5 No. 1 (April 1995) contains three main articles on important wildlife sites of the UAE east coast, Fujairah archaeology and scarab dung beetles of the Al Ain region. The UAE east coast article, by Simon Aspinall, Colin Richardson and Peter Hellyer, is a review of five sites, for each of these some of the important birds to be found there are mentioned, along with other wildlife and flora. *Soft covers, A4 size. Available from the Emirates Natural History Group, PO Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

Sandgrouse

Vol 16 Part 1 (1994) has five main papers which concern a bird atlas of Bulgaria, the black morph of the mourning wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* in Jordan (two articles), long-tailed shrike in Israel and Turkey and activity patterns of semi-captive houbara. Shorter notes concerning Arabian birds or observations relate to breeding alpine swifts, feral populations of Indian silverbill, breeding malachite kingfisher in Yemen and various first records for Kuwait, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Oman. Vol 16 Part 2 (1994) is devoted entirely to Turkey and includes the Turkey Bird Report 1987-91.

OSME Bulletin

Arabian interest in No 34 (Spring 1995) are articles on the status of warblers in Kuwait, crab plovers in Kuwait, and skuas in the Red Sea. Bulletin No 35 (Autumn 1995) has a detailed account of traditional bird trapping in the Farasan islands of Saudi Arabia. *Sandgrouse and the OSME Bulletin are available from OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, UK.*

Oman Bird List (Edition 4) by the Oman Bird Records Committee (1994)

Contains all bird species (432) accepted by the Oman Bird Records Committee up to January 1994. Provides status by region, periods of occurrence and commonality for each species. Card covers, A5 size with center staple (36 pages). Price not known. *Available from Oman Bird Records Committee, PO Box 246, Muscat 113, Sultanate of Oman.*

Fig 11. One of 48 nestling ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* ringed on the Farasan islands during winter 1994/95; see next page.

Report on Ospreys in the Red Sea

A report entitled *The breeding biology and conservation status of the Osprey Pandion h. haliaetus, on the Farasan Islands Protected Area* has been prepared by Paul Fisher (1995) for the NCWCD Riyadh. Paul's study over the winter season 1994/5 revealed some 85 pairs in the area and up to 65 pairs actually breeding. Forty two nests were visited and 48 nestlings ringed. First eggs were laid in the second week in November and continued for 12 weeks; mean clutch size was 2.85. The report provides details of how to make ground predator proof nest platforms and their experimental use on the island. *Author's address; Dept of Biological Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University, Chester Street, Manchester, England*

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SOCIETY NEWS:

Yemen Ornithological Society

Derek Harvey. YOS Coordinator left Yemen in April 1995 the society is now coordinated by Dr Scott Kennedy c/o the US Embassy, P O Box 2234, Sanaa, Republic of Yemen.

Arabian Leopard Trust

In the summer of 1993 a group of Dubai and Abu Dhabi residents, concerned about a spate of killings of caracal and leopard in the mountains of the UAE and Oman, got together and founded the Arabian Leopard Trust (ALT). The Trust aims to:

* educate the general public about Arabian wildlife and the dangers it faces;
* do research to increase knowledge about the habits and habitats of endangered Arabian species;
* to create national parks and nature reserves where wild and re-introduced local animals can be protected;
* and to promote optimal conditions for those animals that are already in captivity so that they can breed and possibly be re-introduced into the wild later.

Funds for the activities needed to achieve these aims are raised by membership subscriptions, adoptions of ALT-animals, sale of promotional/education items and by individual and corporate sponsorships. In the two years since its inception ALT has achieved much, but more is needed before the campaign can be called a success. The work of ALT has become well known to UAE mountain farmers but the recent rescue of a captive leopard, from the suq in Sana'a, Yemen, has brought the species plight to the attention of many people throughout Arabia.

A scientific survey carried out by South African carnivore experts on behalf of ALT showed that the status of indigenous wildlife is a cause for great concern. Very few animals are left and there is no protection for those that are. Two unexpected positive discoveries were the presence of Blanford's fox and Arabian tahr were confirmed in the northern Hajar mountains. Future plans include the development of a breeding site in the UAE mountains on a piece of land donated to ALT by the Ruler of Sharjah and a follow-up survey in winter 1995/6.

Anyone interested in becoming a "Friend of the Arabian Leopard" at US$10 a year, will receive a quarterly update of ALT plans and activities. *For information about animals adoptions, catalogues of promotional items and memberships, write to; The Arabian Leopard Trust, PO Box 24444, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates or fax 971-4-454373.*

Announcements and Requests for Information

1996 OSME AGM

The Ornithological Society of the Middle East Summer Meeting and Eighteenth Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 20 July 1996. The location will be the School of Oriental and African Studies, near Russell Square, London (same venue as in 1995). Further details to be announced in the Spring 1996 OSME Bulletin.

Fig 12. The jacobin cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* has still not been confirmed as a breeding bird in Arabia. Two were seen and heard in southwest Saudi Arabia (IB11) in April 1994 (J-O Hedin) and again September 1995 (G R Lobley).

UAE Ringed Sooty Gulls

The Abu Dhabi island of Qarnein (SB26) was visited by staff from the National Avian Research Center (NARC) this summer, and many seabird pulli were ringed. Apart from the terns, some 274 sooty gull *Larus hemprichii* chicks now bear UAE rings. There are only two colonies of sooty gull in the Arabian Gulf, on Qarnein with about 215 pairs and on Dayyinah (SA26), 20 pairs. Although winter records are known from Qarnein there is an obvious passage of birds along the northern Gulf of Oman coast in spring. Large numbers of sooty gull are known, for example, from Masirah and Dhofar outside the breeding season, but do any UAE birds reach these localities? It may be possible to read part of the ring inscription with the aid of a telescope, which apart from the letter code and number,

bears the address: P O Box 45553, Abu Dhabi. All were fitted the correct way up to give fieldworkers a chance. Can birdwatchers in Arabia keep a sharp look out for any live birds wearing a ring, as well, of course, as looking at both legs of any tide line corpses.

Please report any confirmed ring data and possible sightings (date, location, map reference and ABBA square) to Simon Aspinall, Wildlife Management Unit, NARC, P O Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Fig 13. Please report details of ringed juvenile sooty gulls *Larus hemprichii* to NARC.

Colour Ringed Gulls

Norman van Swelm of the Voorne Bird Observatory, P O Box 305, 3233 ZG Oostvoorne, The Netherlands, has written to draw attention to various colour ringed gulls that may possibly occur in the Arabian region in the winter of 1995/6.

Yellow-legged gull *Larus (argentatus) omissus*: ringed with a single engraved black PVC ring in Latvia.

Yellow-legged gull *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans*: ringed with a single engraved red PVC ring in Poland, Rumania and Ukraine.

Siberian lesser-blacked gulls *Larus (fuscus) heuglini:* ringed with a single engraved white or red PVC ring in Russia and Siberia.

Taimyr gull *Larus (fuscus) taimyrensis*: ringed with a single engraved white or red PVC ring in Russia and Siberia.

Norman would appreciate details of any sightings. He will be happy to send further details and can provide information on colour ringed gulls and avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* ringed recently in the Netherlands, Faeroes, Iceland, Norway and Spain.

Pigeons in Somalia and Addis Ababa

Does any reader have information on the present or recent status of the Somali stock dove (Somali rock pigeon) *Columba oliviae*, or the occurrence of the speckled pigeon *C. guinea*, white-collared pigeon *C. albitorques* and feral pigeon *C. livia* in Addis Ababa? Derek Goodwin, would like to hear from them. His address is 6 Crest View Drive, Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent BR5 1BY, UK

Notes on Breeding Palm Doves

According to Stagg (1994, *Birds of the Riyadh Region*) the palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* was first seen in Riyadh around 1985 but within a decade the species had established itself very successfully. This is apparently mainly due to a reliable and abundant food supply provided by recent agricultural and horticultural developments in many parts of central Saudi Arabia. The bird is now common in Riyadh.

A pair of palm doves was observed breeding in the main building of the NCWCD Riyadh, between May and July 1995. The nest was made of thin dry *Eucalyptus* twigs, loosely arranged on a window sill 5.5 m above ground. The pair made an unsuccessful breeding attempt earlier on an adjacent window sill abandoning the half constructed nest, apparently due to the movements of people inside the building. A paper screen was then pasted on the inner side of the window sill which allowed them to breed peacefully.

Nest construction was by both adults and completed in about 25 days; the nesting materials were arranged in a neat circle, 20 cm in diameter with a 8 cm central depression. The nest construction period on this occasion is extremely long for the average for the species and it may be that both adults were inexperienced and were nesting for the first time. The two eggs were laid on 5 and 6 June. During the first 2-3 days of the incubation period the adults were not very committed but gradually incubated for longer periods. Both adults incubated, but the female did so for longer periods. Most probably only the female incubated during the night. The eggs hatched on 18 and 19 June, giving an incubation period of c. 13 days. Which accords with the incubation period of 12-13 days for the species in Africa (Urban et al, 1986, *The Birds of Africa*; Vol II).

The parents brooded the young regularly until the seventh day and then left the nest frequently. After the ninth day no daytime brooding was observed. The young grew fast. During days 1-6 of the nestling period they huddled together but later on were found looking around quite watchfully and after day 12 they looked around mostly in opposite directions. The young fledged between 5-7 July and thus the nestling period was calculated as c. 17 days. No further activity was recorded on the nest over the next 3-4 days and no adults or young returned to the nest site during the rest of summer.

Urban et al (1986) states that nestlings leave the nest at 12-13 days when still flightless but return to the nest for the next 3-4 days to receive food and to sleep, but do not return once able to fly. It appears that some nestling doves stay longer on the nest at safer places or, as in the present case, are restricted from leaving the nest in a flightless state and only do so when fully grown. Probably for this reason we did not record any further

activity of the nest after the nestlings had fledged.

The palm dove is very versatile in selecting its nest site and materials. Like Pilcher (1994, *Phoenix* 11:14) I have also observed their nests constructed exclusively from thin wiry scraps of copper, at Alligarth, India (Javed & Yahya 1992, *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 88:454).

I appreciate and thankfully acknowledge the help of Mr Ahmad Hussain and Mr Fayz for keeping record of some events in my absence.

H S A Yahya, NCWCD, PO Box 61681, Riyadh, KSA.

Editor's note **The palm dove is an abundant widespread species but detailed records of breeding biology, such as the above, are very few, indeed this is thought to be the only published detailed account of the incubation and nestling period in Arabia. Similar articles for *Phoenix* to support ABBA report sheets are welcome and form an extremely valuable part of the database.**

ABBA Survey 17 to the Northern Edges of the Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia: March 1995

ABBA Survey 17 was to the northern and northwestern edges of the Empty Quarter (Rub al Khali), over the period 11 - 29 March 1995. The map shows the route taken, which commenced just east of al Kharg. During the first part of the survey the areas to the south of Hufoof and the Jafura desert to south east of Salwah were visited, and after that across country westwards to Yabrin and its environs. Following this a detour was made along the highway via Harad and al Kharg to Howtah. Bad weather at Howtah delayed and disrupted the survey which recommenced from Sulayyil working northwards back to al Kharg. The weather throughout the survey was generally inhospitable with dust storms and the associated poor visibility on several days. In the first week there was a severe hail storm just east of ad Dhana. A period of heavy rain commenced on 20 March at Yabrin, and also affected al Kharg, Howtah, Layla and Sulayyil until 23 March. The rain made much of the desert impassable. After the first rains I was badly bogged down for 36 hours in mud in a wadi bed near Howtah, spending several worrying hours as more rain produced floods which washed into the vehicle. Driving south to Sulayyil on 23 March every wadi along the road was in flood and in places the dual carriageway was completely flooded. After 23 March the weather was generally drier and milder.

Before the rains the regions visited had experienced years of arid conditions. As a result there was very little vegetation growth, and hardly any ephemeral plants. Bedouin groups and their herds were very rare and probably no more than a dozen camps were seen throughout the first two weeks. There were no livestock herds in the desert except locally around provided food and water. In the vicinity of Yabrin there are a few acacia bushes but no acacia was found elsewhere in the eastern regions visited. Acacia occurs again in the western areas south of al Kharg along the road to Sulayyil. As a result of the rain by 28 March a previous very arid desert had produced a flush of green shoots of ephemeral plants and acacia seeds had germinated.

The aridity of the region was generally reflected in the very small range of potential breeding birds present and the small populations of each species. Of the 30 target squares (see map) it was not possible to visit one and of the remainder, in four squares no breeding birds were seen at all (although for each of

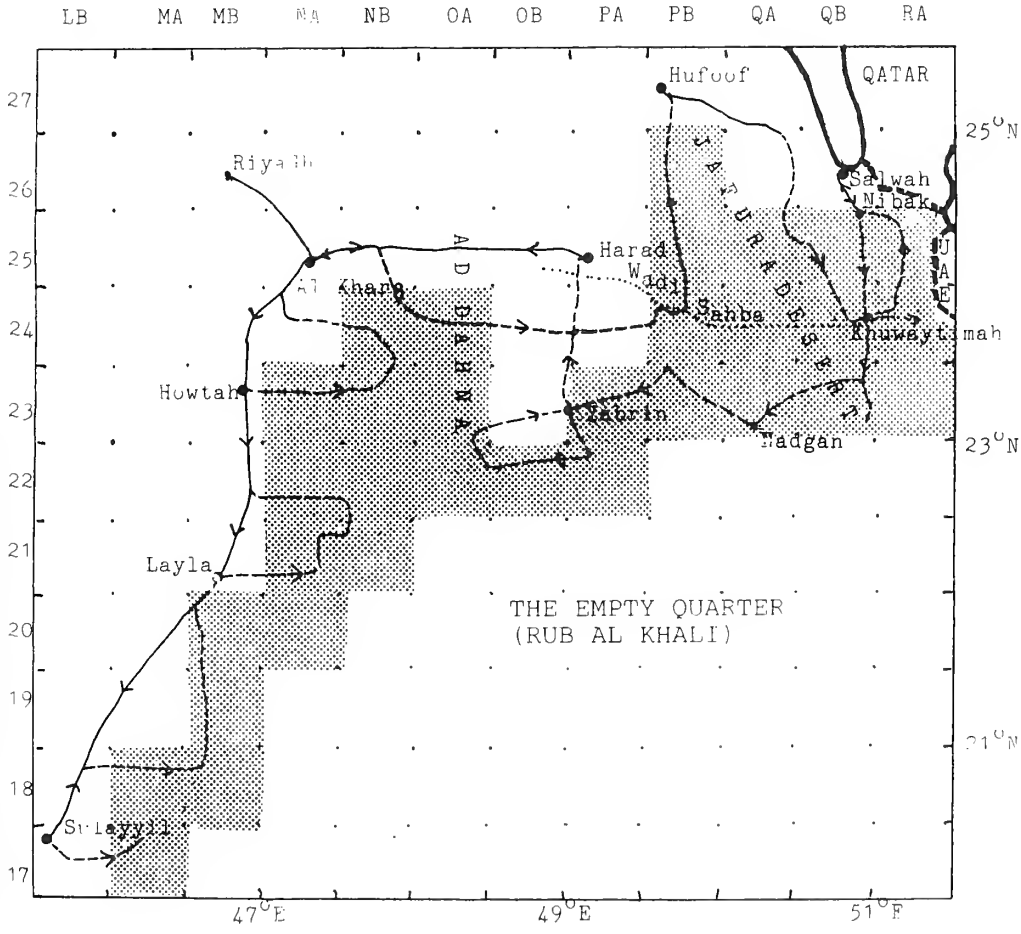

Fig 14. ABBA Survey 17 to the Northern Edge of the Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia, March 1995. The route taken is shown as a broken line, the solid line is the highway and the shaded area is the target zone for the survey. The ABBA square reference can be read from the top and left hand scales.

these squares there was only limited coverage and often poor viewing conditions through dust). In 13 squares only 1-3 breeding birds were present, in eight squares there were 4-8 breeding birds present and in four squares 9 or more. The squares with the highest number of breeding species were PA23, east of Yabrin, and NA21, east of Layla, each with a modest 12 species. The variety in both squares being due to a varied habitats, especially agriculture.

Migrant and visiting bird species were also recorded. A total of only some 80 species, migrants and breeders, were seen during the survey. Of the total about 30 species were breeding or potentially breeding, the majority of these being found only around the inhabited and irrigated edges of the Empty Quarter. The low range of migrant species reflected that no wetlands or coastal areas were included and illustrates just how unattractive and inhospitable the arid areas are to migrants. Up to 200 migrant species pass through Eastern Arabia in spring.

Selected observations of birds seen are:

White stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Six circling over a large irrigated area LB17, 24 March.

Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*
An old nest in MA18, 23 March. This record and details of a young bird in a nest in MB19 (May 1993) reported to me by Ionis Thompson (in March 1995) are the only records from the region since the 1940's.

Long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
Sitting bird disturbed from a nest on low cliffs south of Hufoof (PB27), 15 March. A new breeding locality.

Fig 15. The palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* is now widespread in central Arabia.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
Calling and apparently quite common in irrigated fields MB23, 21-22 March. Also heard NA23, 26 March.

Cream-coloured courser *Cursorius cursor*
One displaying east of Harad, 14 March was the only record. This record is to the south east of the main breeding zone of eastern and northern Saudi Arabia.

Caspian plover *Charadrius asiaticus*
Two Jafura desert, 15 March.

African collared dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*
Heard cooing at Sulayyil (LB17) on 24 March and another visually identified and heard calling, east of Layla (NA21), 26 March. These records extend the range of the species into central Arabian irrigated regions for the first time. They are some 400 km further northeast than previously recorded.

Palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
Common Hufoof, Salwah and Yabrin in the east and also al Kharg, southwards to MB23 and again at Sulayyil. This species is rapidly colonising eastern and central Saudi Arabia. None were seen at the first three localities during ABBA Survey 3 in Spring 1987, and the records from al Kharg to Sulayyil are all recent range extensions.

Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*
Individuals, pairs and small groups seen al Kharg, Howtah, Layla and Sulayyil, especially by farms and irrigated areas.

Eagle owl *Bubo bubo*
Individuals calling south east of al Kharg 12 March and south of Yabrin 19 March, both were new localities for the species.

Pallid swift Apus pallidus
A few at cliffs (screaming) south of Hufoof, 15 March. Also screaming RA25, 16 March and at rocks near Nibak 17 March, which were new localities for the species.

Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunni*
Scarce but widespread. A single bird with a group of bar-tailed desert larks *Ammomanes cincturus* near Nadgan 18 March. Six southwest of Yabrin 20 March, five east of Sulayyil 24 March and one NB24 27 March. All birds appeared to be wandering and no song or breeding activity was observed. These observations extend the range into the edge of the Empty Quarter. The sand sea of the Empty Quarter proper may be a natural barrier to its breeding range.

Hoopoe lark *Alaemon alaudipes*
Probably the most widespread resident bird but present only in very small numbers probably due to the recent drought conditions of the region. In the desert areas the maximum seen in one ABBA square was only three or four but one or two per square was more typical.

Bimaculated lark Melanocorypha bimaculata
Three east of Harad 14 March and two east of Sulayyil, 24 March.

Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*
Two north of Yabrin 14 March and one east of Howtah 27 March.

Black bushchat *Cercotrichas podobe*
Continues to colonise eastern and central Saudi Arabia. Individuals in the Sulayyil and Layla area 23-25 March were new localities and help fill the gap in distribution between western and central Saudi Arabia. Numerous in gardens south of al Kharg, 28 March.

White-crowned black wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*
One northeast of Yabrin 18 March. A new area for the species.

Graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*
Recorded Hufoof 15 March, also just north of Sulayyil (LB18) 23 March, representing a small northwards range extension of the isolated Wadi Dawasir population.

Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*
A group of three MB22, 26 March was the only observation, it represents a small range extension eastwards.

Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
One with a group of house sparrows *P. domesticus* in acacia scrub east of Layla, 26 March.

Mongolian trumpeter finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*
Two birds thought to be this species east of Layla 26 March.

ABBA Survey 17 was sponsored by the NCWCD Riyadh. *MCJ*

ABBA and *Phoenix* Notes and Notices

Donations received

Very welcome donations to the ABBA project have been received during 1994 from the Riyadh Natural History Society (£85) and Derek Harvey, Yemen (£25).

Keep sending in the records

Bound into the middle pages of this issue will be found a reduced sized copy of the instructions to contributors to the project, the standard report form and an example of a completed form. Contributors and potential contributors who do not have a current set of these forms should carefully remove the forms and use them to submit records. Please make enough copies of the report form for your likely use. If you have the facilities please enlarge back to A4 size. Unfortunately space does not permit the reproduction of the current list of Arabian breeding birds (the Form 2 mentioned in the instructions) which contains the species code. Please write in if you would like a copy of this list of breeding birds and their codes or indeed if you need a supply of A4 sized report forms. The species number is obviously important for the record to get onto the database but do not let not having the number stop you from sending in reports. If you do not know the number leave the species code space on the form blank, a number can be added to the form at the office before the record is added to the database.

There is still much scope for collecting breeding bird information even for the common species in well trodden areas. Would observers please continue to send in records and information for their local area and copy ABBA report sheets to the local bird recorder, if there is one. Any outstanding report sheets for 1995 should be sent in as soon as possible.

How to obtain *Phoenix*

One issue of *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £20 for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 13 to 17 inclusive. Because of the unrealistic bank charges for handling foreign cheques those not having access to a UK bank account are asked to pay in sterling or the equivalent in a foreign currency. (All subscribers will receive a reminder when their next subscription is due). *Phoenix* Nos 1 - 11 are available at £2 each (or the set for £14) including postage. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers and observers please remember to advise any change of address.

Fig 16. Why do Egyptian vultures *Neophron percnopterus* still occur in relatively high densities on the larger islands around Arabia, such as Farasan Kebir (HB10/IA10) southern Red Sea, Socotra and Masirah (YB17/YB18) Oman? Over most of their Arabian mainland range they appear to be decreasing in number and have disappeared from some areas. Hardly any study has taken place on the decline in numbers and the reducing ranges of the vultures in Arabia.

Photos needed for *Phoenix*

Photos of Arabian breeding birds, their nests, eggs and habitats etc are welcomed for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos may be in colour or black and white (glossy or matt), slides, prints or negatives, so long as they have good contrast.

Records wanted

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Were there house sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Abu Dhabi in 1960? No one seems to know for sure. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly unusual breeding species are also very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

Contributions to *Phoenix*

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports, publications etc are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. Submissions need not necessarily be typed. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

Fig 17. The sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* is a widespread resident in dry rocky habitat, throughout Arabia except for the northeast. Is it under threat from introductions of its close relative the see see partridge *A. griseogularis*? (See Sir Bani Yas island, Page 3).

The *Phoenix*

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For Sale: ABBA Survey Reports

To date, 18 ABBA Surveys have been completed. For each survey a summary report is prepared which includes the itinerary, a map and details of unusual birds seen etc. This is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, the summaries and full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition, a small number are available for sale. Full reports of Surveys Nos 4 to 12, are currently available. (See details in the sales list accompanying this newsletter).

Letters: Streptopelia Doves

Derek Goodwin author of *Pigeons and Doves of the World* (British Museum, 1967) has written regarding the mention in *Phoenix* 11 (p.4) that feral Barbary doves *Streptopelia roseogrisea (risoria)* are breeding on Sir Bani Yas island (SB25) where they are said to be hybridising with Eurasian collared dove *S. decaocto*. He makes others points about *Streptopelia* doves and their relationships which observers might like to take note of and perhaps investigate further.

> "If, as I suppose is the case though I have no experience, the coos and the excitement call of the Arabian race of *S roseogrisea* are like that of the nominate African race, then it does not closely resemble any other species of *Streptopelia* in voice, certainly not *S. decaocto*, and so could indeed be identified in Arabia on voice alone from *S. decaocto*. The coos and excitement call of the domestic Barbary Dove are, no doubt allowing for minor individual variations that one finds in most, if not all doves/pigeons, just like those of *S.r. roseogrisea*.
>
> It would, I think, be as well if the Barbary Doves that are said to be hybridising with the Eurasian Collared Dove have been, or could be, checked for identify by their voice. For in Britain and probably elsewhere as well, the Collared Dove has produced numbers of creamy buff morphs that in the field appear identical in colour to the "normal;" creamy buff colour morph of the Barbary Dove. In fact when I first saw such birds I thought they were Barbaries that had escaped and joined their congeners but when I investigated, close examination of shape and proportions (though the jizz of the two does not differ) suggest and the vocalisations of all that I heard coo or give the "ham actress having hysterics" excitement call proved, that these were pure *S. decaocto*. I wrote a short paper on this (*British Birds* 1973; 66:373-376).

The Eurasian and African Collared Doves have struck many ornithologists as being close relatives and I think I put them as members of a superspecies in the first edition of *Pigeons and Doves of the World* but as I wrote in the third edition, I came to think that the African Collared Dove may be as closely related (and I now think, phylogenetically possibly even closer) to its fellow inhabitants of Africa, *S. capicola*, *S decipiens* and possibly even *S. reichenowi* as to *S. decaocto.*

What, if anything, is happening now between the Eurasian Collared Dove and the Laughing (Palm) Dove *S. senegalensis*? It has often struck me that in many ways the Collared Dove utilises a similar niche in British villages, suburbs and towns, to that of the Laughing Dove where I have observed them in Egypt and in Western Australia. In India (from what I can glean from bird books) the small, dull Indian race of *S. senegalensis* excludes the much larger *S. decaocto* in the role of dove about the bungalow".

A New Shearwater from the Indian Ocean

The summer issue of the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists Club* 115:75-87, described a new shearwater *Puffinus atrodorsalis* Mascarene shearwater. It has been recorded from South Africa, Madagascar, Seychelles, Comorro, Kenya and Eilat at the head of the Red Sea. Compared to the Persian shearwater *P. lherminieri* it has a lighter bill and less extensive pectoral patches. Its breeding grounds are not yet known. Another species to look out for at sea and on Arabian shores.

Layla Lakes Central Arabia - RIP!

In the very first issue of *Phoenix* (1984) I described the unique 'site of Layla Lakes which lie just to the south of Aflaq (MB21) in central Arabia. I based my original report on observations made at the lakes in 1976/77. Once it was a natural breeding site for several wetland bird species and a watering place for countless others. By 1987 the site was already coming under threat from water extraction and the water level had dropped some 14 m to reveal cliffs providing nesting sites for many rock doves *Columba livia* (*Phoenix* 4:6). I have been able to visit the site over the years since from time to time and have been saddened to witness its inexorable decline. In March 1995, my last visit, the largest lake had totally dried up, leaving a trough 30 m deep by 300 m wide and almost 1000 m long. It contained not a drop of water which was particularly ironic that week as everywhere else nearby was inundated with floods from torrential rains. Judging by the saltbushes growing in the basin it had been totally dry for at least a year.

Arabia has lost a unique natural site. Probably no breeding bird species will be threatened by this loss, but we will never know what botanical and invertebrate life has gone forever because the site appears never to have had any detailed biological study made of it. Man has certainly lost a spot that was a both a great amenity and a sight for eyes weary from arid landscapes. We are all poorer. *MCJ*

Torgos tracheliotos

Pick up virtually any reference which deals with the lappet-faced vulture and you will find the specific scientific name spelt *tracheliotus.* This is the spelling used so far by the ABBA project. Recently *Phoenix* reader Dr Peter Mundy of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, Zimbabwe, has written and kindly pointed out that this spelling is erroneous. In his book *The Vultures of Africa,* 1992 (see review *Phoenix* 10:10), he draws attention to the fact that the name has been consistently misspelt ever since it was first described by J R Forster in 1796 as *Vultur tracheliotos.* He points out that the original name used by Forster has priority and that the name accurately reflects the original "eared" (Greek *otos*) naming given by Levaillant, who collected the first specimen in southern Namibia in the 1780s.

This change was to late for the *Interim Atlas* but *tracheliotos* will be used henceforth by the ABBA project and in *Phoenix.*

New Breeding Species

1253 Great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

There have been numerous records of the great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* singing in spring and early summer at several sites in Arabia. The first conclusive evidence of breeding is an observation of two fledglings at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31) Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia in May 1995 by Peter Symens. Further details of this record are awaited.

Nearby in Kuwait, a bird examined in the hand (April/May 1995) by Charles Pilcher was identified as a Basra reed warbler *Acrocephalus (arundinaceus) griseldis.* It was found to have a brood patch and an egg in the oviduct, good evidence for likely breeding.

Fig 18. The golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* has breeding strongholds in the deserts of north central Saudi Arabia and central Oman.

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New Breeding Species noted during the ABBA period

Since the ABBA project started in 1984, 40 or so new breeding species have been identified in Arabia which were not previously known. The breeding details of all these birds have been given in *Phoenix* the issue and page numbers are given against each. For each species the ABBA code number is shown, note that all birds which are not normally found within the western palearctic region are given a number in a sequence beginning with 2000. The new breeding birds can be placed in three groups. The biggest group are the exotic species that have been introduced to the Arabian region, these are:

170 Egyptian goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* (6:1)
186 Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (2:2)
2036 Grey crowned crane *Balearica regulorum* (11:4)
2035 Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (11:4)
364 See see partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis* (11:4)
2037 Barbary dove *Streptopelia risoria* (11:4)
2024 Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* (9:4)
2008 Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus* (3:2)
2017 Sulphur-crested cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* (3:2)
2007 Red-whiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* (2:2)
2039 Pied mynah *Sturnus contra* (8:2)
1577 Brahminy mynah *Sturnus pagodarum* (11:5)
2019 Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (9:5)
2028 Streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar* (9:5)
2029 Avadavat *Amandava amandava* (8:2)

Another large group of new breeding species are those that have been able to breed in Arabia only in recent years because suitable a breeding habitat, or a food supply, now exist for them which was not available earlier. These birds are:

12 Black-necked grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* (1:2)
104 Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (8:3)
108 Squacco heron *Ardeola ralloides* (8:3)
194 Shoveler *Anas clypeata* (9:2)
410 Little crake *Porzana parva* (8:3)
465 Collared pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (1:2)
492 White-tailed plover *Chettusia leucura* (9:3)
841 European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (7:2)
968 Short-toed lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* (8:2)
1251 Reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (4:2)
1253 Great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceous* (12:19)
1582 European starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (8:2)
1653 Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (6:2)
1882 Corn bunting *Miliaria calandra* (10:3)

The third group are those that probably always did breed in Arabia but have only recently been proved to do so or occur in Arabia at the very extreme of their range:

303 Lesser kestrel *Falco Naumanni* (7:1)
605 Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (11:3)
611 Sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis* (8:3)
2009 Olive pigeon *Columba arquatrix* (4:1)
724 Eurasian cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (9:4)
2018 Mountain nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* (9:5)
2005 Malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata* (10:2)
960 Thick-billed lark *Ramphocoris clotbey* (5:2)
1149 Desert wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (6:2)
2021 African reed warbler *Acroceplialus baeticatus* (6:3)
1592 Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (8:2)
1601 Pale rock sparrow *Petronia brachydactyla* (3:1)

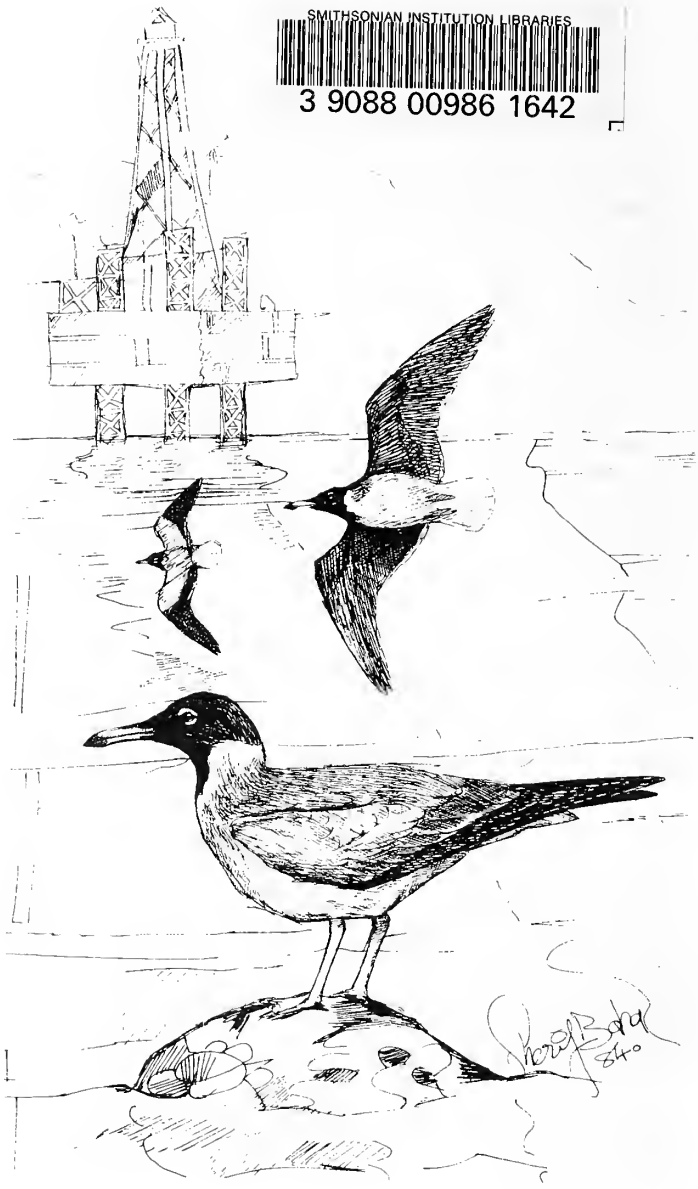

Fig 19. The white-eyed gull *Larus leucophthalmus* is endemic to the Red Sea basin, only rarely straggling along the coast of southern Arabia.

Credits

Word processing Lorraine Russell. Artwork; great reed warbler, little bittern, brahminy mynah, water rail, avocet, grey francolin, goliath heron, palm dove, Egyptian vulture and sand partridge, Mark Andrews; African silverbill, jacobin cuckoo and golden eagle, Dave Showler; Arabian babbler, John Busby; white-eyed gull, Sherif Baha el Din. Photos; osprey, Paul Fisher; sooty gull, MCJ. Maps, layout, production, Carol Qirreh and MCJ. Software and computer consultant Terry Rowell. Printed by Lakeshore Graphics, Nottingham UK.

Address

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